

From: Councilmember Marc Elrich (At-large)

We have received numerous questions and comments regarding Bus Rapid Transit/Rapid Transit Vehicle proposals. Below are a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that will help explain these proposals.

RTV/BRT FAQs

Q: What do RTV and BRT mean?

The acronym RTV stands for rapid transit vehicles and BRT is bus rapid transit. The term RTV is used to distinguish it as high-end BRT with dedicated guideways (out of traffic) for the vehicles, visible and permanent stations, and frequent service. To be honest, some people shy away from using the word “bus” because of the negative reputation associated with existing bus service. Nevertheless, the two acronyms (RTV and BRT) are two different ways to signal a new level of public transit not currently available in our county.

Q: Why do we need a RTV system?

A: We need it for environmental, economic and quality-of-life reasons. First, our county is at risk of being overrun by gridlock even accounting only for *existing and approved* development. Many of our major intersections are clogged, and navigating the roads at rush hour can be a disaster. Additionally, more and more residents want public transit to be a viable commuting option, but Metrorail is not an option for many people, either because of where they live, or where they work. Second, we need to get people out of their cars. Our region is a non-attainment area for the Clean Air Act and projections show CO2 emissions worsening. We need to provide real alternatives so that people will leave their cars at home. Finally, we need a system that complements and supplements Metrorail and that runs like Metrorail (reliable, dedicated right of way, real station stops, frequent service). But we simply can’t afford to build more heavy rail lines; nor do we need to – we can meet the need with surface transitways running in dedicated travel lanes. RTV is an investment in the economic and environmental health of our county.

Q: Why don’t we simply add on to Metrorail?

A: It’s too expensive. Adding additional heavy rail (like Metrorail) costs about \$250-350 million dollars/mile to construct. Light rail, which is what the planned Purple Line will be, costs about \$75-125 million/mile. We can build a high quality RTV system with the most important attributes of Metrorail for an average cost of \$13 million/mile.

Q: Most people don’t ride public transit now. Why do you think they would use the RTV system?

A: The existing buses all ride in lanes shared with all the other traffic so they move slowly, even more slowly than cars. Additionally, most have frequent stops, infrequent service, require cumbersome transfers and are often crowded and uncomfortable. The truth is that our current Ride-On system is not designed to attract riders who have the option to drive. While Metrorail runs frequently, its service is focused on getting into Washington DC rather than around the county. High quality RTV (the only kind that’s worth doing) will allow residents to move around the county on a transit system that’s reliable, not stuck in general traffic and runs with sufficient frequency. The proposed system is a complete network of north-south and east-west routes designed to move

people from where they live to where they work. This system would attract new transit riders, not just those who currently ride the bus, by making it a desirable alternative to driving in stop and go traffic. In other areas of the country, these types of lines - not even systems - have dramatically increased ridership. The new Orange Line in Los Angeles County increased ridership by 51%. Ridership on the Cleveland "Health Line" increased 60% over the bus line it replaced. We can also increase demand through use of limiting employee parking in various parts of the county.

Q: We already have lots of buses – both Ride On and WMATA (Metro) buses. Wouldn't this system simply duplicate what we already have?

A: No. First, the RTV system would not be just another bus that runs in the lanes with traffic; it would run in dedicated lanes – think "surface subway". Second, the existing Ride On routes would be reconfigured to offer shorter routes that would move people from the neighborhoods to the RTV lines, providing faster, more frequent and more reliable service. The RTV lines during rush hour would run with the frequency you'd expect of a rail system so that wait times at stations are minimized. WMATA buses that currently serve proposed RTV routes would go into the dedicated lanes as would some Ride-On routes.

Q: What would be different between the proposed RTV system and existing buses?

A: An RTV system would travel mostly in dedicated travel lanes (that is, cars could not use the lanes); off-board fare collection (like Metrorail where you must pay before you get on the train); frequent, reliable service (a schedule not needed, like Metrorail); permanent, visible stations; and multiple routes comprising a network so that people can move around the county easily.

Q: The report estimates that it would cost about \$1.8 billion for the system. Isn't that a lot of money?

A: Yes, but the cost of doing nothing is much greater – ever increasing congestion, pollution, degraded quality of life and lost economic opportunity. Part of what's included in the \$1.8 billion is \$600 million for the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), which the state had been willing to provide when the CCT was a stand-alone project. The County already makes comparable investments over time for schools and roads. In fact, part of our problem is that we've spent transportation dollars almost exclusively on roads (the 18-mile ICC cost more than this system and serves fewer people), and have failed to provide a balanced transportation system. In the future, if congestion is not addressed to some extent with transit, then we face more road-only solutions that will require more road widening and more grade separated inter-changes. There is no scenario where the status quo will remain unchanged. So we can either manage change in a way that lessens the impact on our communities or we will get buried in traffic. Put another way, we will continue to grow, and we will either have to get more cars off the roads, or make the roads bigger to hold the additional cars. Anyone who suggests that we can not do this, and then nothing will change, is not being realistic.

Q: How can we afford to pay for this? Will we get federal funding?

A: The Transit Task Force (explained in another FAQ below) looked at this question in great depth and proposed a variety of options. None of the options were recommended by

the Task Force, they simply explored what some of the different choices were. There are funding scenarios that have not been explored. The funding mechanism will be chosen by the Executive and Council only after a more thorough exploration of practical solutions and a broad public discussion.

The Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), which is included in the RTV network, is being proposed for federal and state funding. It is well along the way in the many-year process required to request federal funds and that is a third of the overall cost. In order to get the remainder of the system up and running in any reasonable amount of time, federal funds are a limited option because of a lack of Federal Transportation funding. We also hope to get State participation, but again the State funds are very limited as well.. The Task Force recommends bond financing, the process by which we fund roads, schools, libraries, police and fire stations, recreation centers and government buildings, which could be financed through special taxing districts. In Northern Virginia (including Fairfax), transportation infrastructure (both road and transit) are being paid for by an additional taxes in their base rates on commercial property. And in priority development areas, like Tysons Corner and the Route 28 Corridor, special taxing districts are in place for commercial property and new development (on top of the higher base rate) in order to build the needed infrastructure. These special taxes in Northern Virginia are far higher than what we would need in the County. With this approach, the big financial beneficiaries - the commercial property owners – shoulder the expense rather than homeowners - this approach has been shown to work across the river.

Q: What does this system mean for the economic outlook for Montgomery County?

A: With RTV we can reduce congestion and offer residents and employees first-class public transit while also preserving our high quality of life: we become an even more attractive county in which to live and do business. Right now, the Silver Line is being constructed through Tysons Corner, offering businesses and residents there a transit alternative. The RTV system offers much more than the Silver Line and can be an important economic magnet. We have three science centers developed or developing in the County. The RTV system connects this triangle. The system provides the East county with transit access to jobs in the I-270/355 corridor where 85% of the jobs over the next 30 years are projected to be.

Q: What is the Transit Task Force (TTF) and where can I find the TTF report?

A: The Transit Task Force was appointed by the County Executive “to make a comprehensive rapid transit system in Montgomery County a reality.” Go to www.montgomerycountymd.gov/transit to learn more about the TTF and its report.

Q: What do we spend on roads?

A: Good question! Our roads are not cheap and everyone pays for them – not just the road users. We also all pay for them in non-monetary ways – increased road use and pollution. Road projects are expensive, costing millions of dollars. Recent road projects have included Father Hurley Blvd Extended for \$22 million, Montrose Parkway West \$76 million, Travilah Road \$13 million and Woodfield Road Extended, \$14 million. Some of the county road projects planned in the upcoming six years include Montrose Parkway East \$31 million (and an additional \$68 million beyond the six years), Goshen Road South \$21 million (with an additional \$104 million planned for beyond the six

years), Snouffer School Road \$23 million and Snouffer School Road North (Webb Tract) \$11 million. Additionally, the County budget includes millions of dollars for road resurfacing, which is important but should be recognized as a road cost for comparison purposes.

Q: How would RTV interact with Metro and the Purple Line?

A: The system would be designed so that passengers could move between the different systems. All of the RTV routes interface with the Metro (and the Purple Line when it's built) at different points. All the transit options would use the same fare payment system.

Q: How will this RTV system affect the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT)?

A: The Governor recently agreed with the Montgomery County Executive, County Council and the majority of the local community that the CCT should be bus rapid transit instead of light rail. Therefore, the CCT will be incorporated into the RTV system with the already agreed-upon stops and route. In fact, the CCT would be part of the first phase of the RTV system.

Q: Would I need a schedule to use the RTV?

A: No. Like Metrorail, the RTV would run frequently throughout the day, but especially during rush hour.

Q: What would it cost to ride RTV?

A: That has not yet been determined.

Q: Could I use my metro Smartcard?

A: Yes, the county plan is to make its payment system completely compatible with the WMATA payment system.

Q: What are the costs of NOT building the RTV system?

A: Imagine the DC area without Metrorail (which is more similar to the RTV system than metrobus). The entire area would be gridlocked. Metro has been central to the economic health of the region. Without an RTV system, our County is at greater risk for degraded neighborhoods, clogged roads and increased pollution.

Q: Won't you have to widen roads to give RTV a dedicated travel lane?

A: Not necessarily and not in too many places. That will vary from one route to the next. In some areas, such as Georgia Avenue, north of Glenmont there's plenty of room for a dedicated RTV lane. In some areas existing lanes can be narrowed to create an additional lane or the median can be used. Not all areas need two-directional dedicated lanes. In some areas, it may be worthwhile to take a lane for short distances that is currently used for cars. In other areas, the RTV may have to travel in the car lanes along with the cars for a limited distance. Each area/route will require specific, appropriate solutions.

Q: I like the idea, but I'm nervous about the actual implementation. As they say, "the devil is in the details." How can I be supportive and yet protect my community, which I love just the way it is?

A: This is democracy at its most basic level. Engage with decision makers every step of the way. The report makes clear that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Every

community will need a different design and will require that residents participate throughout the design. I believe that we can and should design all of the first phase using existing right-of-way and without further widening of our roads.

Q: This sounds great. When will it be built and when can I start using it?

A: If we commit to it now, the Task Forces estimates that we could have the entire 160-mile system in 9 years.

Q: What is happening now to advance the RTV system?

A: Montgomery County's Park & Planning agency is reviewing the proposed routes and system in order to add it to the Master Plan for Highways. They are expected to submit their proposal to the County Council in Summer 2013. Once the routes are part of the Master Plan, more funding options are available. Now that the TTF report has been submitted to the Executive, he will make a recommendation to Council.

Q: What happens on US29/Colesville Road without RTV?

A: It is likely that as traffic increases, the State Highway Administration will begin to ban left turns and perhaps take the median to add reversible lanes which is what they were forced to do south of Sligo Creek Parkway. Over the years the State has added lanes to Georgia, Connecticut, Viers Mill, University Blvd. and Rte 29, often reducing yards, limiting turns and reducing medians.

Q: What would RTV's impact be in the East County/White Oak where Science City East is being planned?

A: RTV would allow the development and jobs of East County Science Gateway without altering road widths. Without transit, this area would remain in transportation failure and could jeopardize prospects for developing around FDA and Adventist Hospital, which is supported by the surrounding communities.

Q: How could you possibly fit RTV lanes on Connecticut Avenue south of the beltway? There simply isn't enough room.

A: Connecticut Avenue is one of the routes that only requires a single reversible lane (about 10.5 feet) since most of the congestion is one direction - southbound in the morning and northbound in the evenings. The RTV would use the guideway only in the rush hour direction, ie, in the morning the RTV would travel south in the guideway and the morning northbound RTVs would travel in the regular traffic lanes, which are not congested in that direction. There are two possibilities to get enough width for the one dedicated lane, either by narrowing of existing car lanes (as part of the county road code passed a few years ago) combined with using parts of the median strips or by repurposing one of the existing lanes to maximize the number of people able to travel on Connecticut Avenue.

Q: Would RTV make it easier for residents in northern Montgomery County to access Shady Grove Metro?

A: Yes. In addition to the CCT which services Germantown and the Great Seneca Science Corridor on the west side of I-270 into the Shady Grove Metro, there is a line on the east side of I-270 from Clarksburg to service Montgomery College and Gaithersburg.

Q: Isn't light rail a better solution?

A: Light rail is simply not an option. It requires two tracks and more right of way. In a built environment it would be extremely costly to engineer and build. The Purple Line, in part, has an abandoned rail line to run on which is far easier to build on, but even then costs are pushing north of \$120 million/mile as compared to about \$13 million/mile. Additionally, it's not necessary. Well-designed and implemented BRT can provide the same amenities as light rail at a fraction of the cost.

Q: Will this system enable the county to develop and urbanize even more quickly?

A: The system will reduce auto usage for developments that we have already planned. The growth forecasts are based on existing Master Plans, not increased because of the RTV system. People will live and work in these Master Planned communities, and how livable these communities will be is highly dependent on reducing the use of single-occupant cars. Historically, rather than providing meaningful transportation alternatives, the County has simply redefined what's acceptable to include ever-worsening conditions in order to approve development, an approach I do not support, but it has been County practice for a long time. That is why I believe that if we want a different future, a future that doesn't involve turning every road into a parking lot, then we need to manage change so that transit plays a bigger role.

If the County sticks to focusing growth at the Metro stops, then urbanization will be less of an issue. It's why I've voted against zoning changes that bring increased density to edges of neighborhoods and why I oppose blanket changes to zoning of every shopping center and commercial building in the County that would actually increase development away from transit. We cannot pat ourselves on the back and label what we do as Smart Growth when we increase densities throughout the County in areas that symbolize sprawl and have little or no public transportation. Monitor the on-going zoning code rewrite, which is where the real effort is being made to increase density everywhere.

Q: If I don't live close to one of the RTV lines, will I be taxed to pay for it? If so, why? It doesn't benefit me.

A: Well, that's an odd question since the same could be said for a myriad of things government does. If you take a broad view, we all benefit. Studies showed that an RTV system reduced future traffic congestion by taking a significant number of cars off the road. So if you drive, it will make your drive easier than if all those riders were competing with you for space on the road. It reduces vehicle miles travelled and auto emissions, a soup of pollutants and a major contributor to health problems and global warming. So if either of those things matter to you, then you benefit. If it allows us to attract quality projects to areas we've designated for growth, then it increases the tax base and lessens the tax burden on you. So you benefit. You don't have to ride it to benefit, any more than I have to ride the Metro to benefit. Those hundreds of thousands of cars that aren't on the road at rush hour, definitely make my drive better.

Q: Isn't underground rail (like metrorail) much more reliable than surface vehicles on the road?

A: Not necessarily. When a rail line loses power, the entire system is affected. If a RTV vehicle is disabled in a guideway, other buses on the route can exit, drive around the

disabled vehicle via the regular traffic lanes and then re-enter the dedicated guideway. Throughout all of this, the rest of the RTV system would function with minimal to no disruption.